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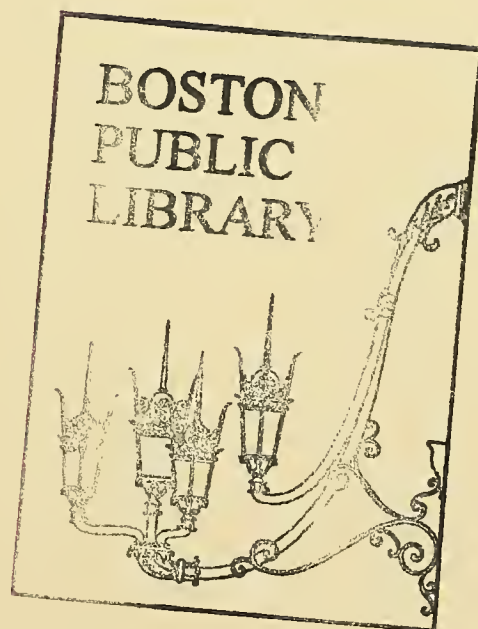


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WASHINGTON PARK 1975

Florence C. Ladd

Despite the renewal efforts and expense invested by groups of residents and the BRA in the 1960's, Washington Park appears to be a way-station to the fringe neighborhoods and suburbs of Boston for many of its Black lower-middle class and working class residents. Instead of its having attracted relatively permanent residents to its 221(d)3 housing and relatively new community facilities, it is viewed by some long-time residents as an area which holds little attraction for newcomers who migrate presumably from lower Roxbury and the South End and from other cities and towns to Washington Park where they live for 2 to 4 (?) years and then again move. The once-influential black bourgeois residents have dwindled in numbers, their power has dwindled within the Washington Park and Boston's City Hall. One informed observer stated that most residents of the area do not express a feeling of belonging to the area. Their expected tenure there is brief; their commitment slight.

At this point in history the residents of Washington Park appear to be a body without agenda and objectives, leadership and proposals. To say that they are without agenda and objectives does not mean that they are without problems and concerns. There is a high level of concern about the quality of public education available and about criminal acts against individuals and personal property. In the opinion of editor-publisher Melvin Miller, the quality of education and "internal crime" are Washington Park's major

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problems. The declining of the quality of Roxbury neighborhoods on the periphery of Washington Park also presents problems. A low level of concern about the quality of housing, streets, and community facilities within the renewal area is also a problem.

To say that Washington Park residents lack leadership does not mean that they are without spokespersons. There are several responsible people, among them residents of Washington Park and politicians who have an interest in Washington Park, who speak for its residents. Except for elected representatives of the area, there is little to suggest that others who speak for the area have constituencies. There are no contemporary figures in Washington Park comparable to Snowdens who in the 1950's and early 60's developed a power base among the black bourgeoisie and with BRA forged the renewal plan for the area. The identification of a concerned constituency and its potential leaders would be a contribution to the development of strategies for improving the quality of life and the environment in Washington Park.

A meeting about the status of Washington Park with members of the BRA staff revealed that the future of the renewal area is problematic from the vantage point of planners with the Redevelopment Authority. They seemed primarily concerned about the financial future of the housing stock that is faced with foreclosure. They raised academic questions about whether an area should be carved out for renewal as Washington Park was; and questions about the value and life expectancy of a renewal project that

is surrounded by blighted areas. The only suggestion offered which might benefit residents was the creation of tenants' organizations which somehow might develop a financial strategy to protect the 221(d)3 housing. In the absence of federal programs, BRA appears to lack the authority and funding which would encourage proposals from and/or for the Washington Park area. It is clear that, at this time, BRA has no further plans for Washington Park.

When a workshop on Washington Park was contemplated initially, BRA District Planner, Quaco Clutterbuck suggested the following:

PROBLEM. The problem from the viewpoint of the BRA, is how to rescue the community and its housing stock with the existing Federal programs.

The problem for participants in the workshop is to analyze the community, its housing and facilities, and to develop strategies and proposals which would be included in a BRA policy statement and plan for the future of Washington Park.

It has become apparent that a plan or strategy for the future of Washington Park derived for the workshop analysis should be addressed to the residents of the area as well as to BRA. Clutterbuck has stated explicitly that the Washington Park area should continue to offer working class black families and individuals desirable housing, services, and community life. The area should be "protected" from exploitation by middle-class whites, on the one hand, who are attracted by the old housing stock in Washington Park and, on the other hand, protected from physical and social deterioration to a level which will render the area unattractive to present residents.

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Plans, strategies and exhibits which include feasible economic proposals to prevent the financial collapse of 221(d)3 housing, proposals which will arrest the social problems in the area and improve the public image of Washington Park should be developed as products of the workshop.

